Met Office

December 2008

The averaging period used for the following assessment was 1961-1990.

UK overview

Maximum temperatures were generally below average and around 1 °C below average across parts of southern England. It was the coldest December since 1996 for England and Wales for maximum temperatures. Minimum temperatures were well below normal across almost all of the UK, by as much as 2 °C in some western areas. It was the coldest December since 1996 for Wales and N Ireland, 1999 for Scotland and 2001 for England. Rainfall was below or well-below normal in most areas, only around 50% of normal over parts of England and Wales, but locally 150% in eastern Scotland. Sunshine was above normal virtually everywhere, approaching double the normal amount in some parts of England.

Westleton (Suffolk) recorded a maximum temperature of 14.7 °C on 20th. Aviemore (Highland) recorded a minimum temperature of -12.9 °C on 30th. Middlefell Farm, Mickleden (Cumbria) recorded 99.0 mm of rainfall on 19th. Copley (County Durham) recorded 21 cm of lying snow at 0900 UTC on 4th. Wind gusts of 82 mph were recorded at Capel Curig (Gwynnedd) on 4th, and at Blackford Hill, Edinburgh on 19th.

England diary of highlights

Generally cold first half then a milder, mainly dry, period towards Christmas before turning very cold by the new year. Rainfall mostly below normal. Sunshine generally above or well above normal. Temperatures around one degree below normal; coldest December since 2001.

1st to 3rd: A cold northerly flow for the first few days, with widespread frosts and icy conditions away from north-facing coasts. Sunshine and showers, wintry on hills, on 1st and 3rd. A more general area of rain, with sleet on hills, moved south during 2nd. Very cold nights with -11.3 °C at Shap (Cumbria), -8.2 °C at Keswick (Cumbria) and -8.0 °C at Leeming (N Yorkshire) early on 1st. Temperatures struggled to rise by day in the Midlands northwards, but nearer normal in the south.

4th to 5th: An Atlantic low gave rain, sleet and snow, the snow mainly confined to northern England, especially over Cumbria, the Pennines and north-east England. Accumulations of 5 to 10 cm were recorded in the Vale of York, and 15 to 20 cm over higher ground. Further south, a milder westerly flow meant rain or sleet was reported. There was a marked contrast in daytime temperatures, with barely 2 °C in the north-east on 4th but up to 11 °C on the south coast.

6th to 11th: A ridge of high pressure moved east during 6th and 7th leading to a spell of mainly dry, fine weather. However, there were sharp night frosts and freezing fog patches, with temperature minima of -8.5 °C at Topcliffe (N Yorkshire), -6.7 °C at Leeming and-5.6 °C at Hurn (Dorset). During 8th, a band of rain moved erratically south across northern parts of England, into the Midlands during the evening. A cold, showery northerly then set in bringing a return of sunny spells, wintry showers and night frosts.

12th to 15th: A change to less cold but more unsettled conditions as Atlantic lows moved in, becoming slow-moving to the north of Scotland and also over the continent. An occluding front moved east early on 13th, giving a period of very heavy rain for a time in many areas, with 53.0 mm at Shap (Cumbria) and 37.6 mm at Dunkeswell (Devon). Flooding was reported in parts of Devon, Somerset, Wiltshire and the West Midlands. Windy ahead of rain band, with gusts 40 to 50 m.p.h. quite widely. Turning drier and colder again on 14th and 15th albeit with a few showers.

16th to 18th: A changeable period. Staying cold in the south-east on 16th with freezing fog slow to clear. However, a change to milder conditions as south-westerly winds moved in by 17th. Thereafter, often very windy with periods of heavy rain and gales across northern areas, especially on 19th and again on 20th with reports of flooding over parts of the north-west. A good deal of dry weather in the south and temperatures rather mild or mild.

19th to 25th: Several days of mostly dry and mild weather. Westerly winds often brought cloudy skies, though a few bright intervals occurred mainly in the east. There was occasional drizzle across western coasts and hills. Temperatures were well above average on these days, with Westleton (Suffolk) recording a maximum temperature of 14.7 °C on the 20th.

26th to 31st: A return to very cold, but mostly dry conditions. Easterly winds developed, ushering in some very cold low-level air from the continent. Initially, cloud amounts were variable and most places saw some decent sunny spells, but there were sharp frosts night and morning. With time, cloud amounts tended to increase, and as winds fell light, freezing fog became more of a problem and night frosts became locally severe. With fog and low cloud persisting all day towards the end of the year, many places on the 30th and 31st had daytime maxima below freezing including -2.6 °C at Shap, and -3.6 °C at Keswick. Night minima included -9.6 °C at Shap and -7.2 °C at Woodford (Greater Manchester).

Wales diary of highlights

Generally cold first half then milder period before Christmas before turning cold again. Rainfall below normal. Sunshine well above normal. Temperatures below normal; coldest December since 1996.

1st to 3rd: A cold northerly flow covered Wales for the first few days of the month, with widespread frosts and icy conditions. Sunshine and wintry showers on 1st and again on 3rd but a more general area of rain, sleet and hill snow moved south early on the 2nd. Very cold nights but temperatures nearer normal in the south by day.

4th to 5th: An Atlantic low brought rain, sleet and hill snow, clearing to blustery showers, these heavy and thundery at times during 5th. Windy in the west. After a cold start to 4th, temperatures recovered to near normal by day but with local frost and fog patches under lighter winds in the east.

6th to 11th: A ridge of high pressure moved east during 6th and 7th leading to a spell of mainly dry, clear or sunny weather with near-normal maximum temperatures. However, there were sharp night frosts and freezing fog patches. During 8th a band of rain moved erratically south into northern parts of Wales during the evening. A cold, showery northerly then set in bringing a return of sunny spells, wintry showers and night frosts.

12th to 15th: A change to less cold and more unsettled conditions as Atlantic lows moved in, becoming slow-moving to the north of Scotland and also over the continent. An occluding front moved east early on 13th, giving a period of very heavy rain for a time in many parts, 35.3 mm at St Clears (Carmarthenshire) late on 12th. Windy ahead of rain band, with gusts 40 to 50 m.p.h. quite widely. Turning drier and colder again on 14th and 15th, albeit with a few showers for a time and some lingering fog patches.

16th to 18th: A change to milder conditions as south-westerly winds moved in during 16th. Thereafter, often windy with rain or drizzle, some heavy on western upslopes, especially later on 18th, but also drier, brighter spells, especially in the east. Temperatures rather mild or mild, generally 9 to 11°C by day, reaching 12.8 °C at Hawarden (Flintshire).

19th to 21st: On 19th, some mostly light rain spread eastwards, though the rain rather persistent across west or south-west facing upslopes of north-west Wales (especially Snowdonia). The 20th and 21st continued cloudy with drizzle at times over western coasts and hills, but dry elsewhere. Quite windy, especially on 19th and 20th across the north of Wales with gales over north-western coasts and hills. Temperatures near normal to mild.

22nd to 25th: Cloudy for many with a moist westerly airflow bringing outbreaks of drizzle at times, especially over western coasts and hills, though a few breaks at times to the lee of high ground across eastern Wales where it was also mainly dry. Mild or very mild overnight with temperature minima of 5 to 10 °C for most on the mornings of 22nd to 24th, and mild by day, maximum 13.5 °C at Hawarden on 22nd, but maxima nearer 9 or 10 °Con 24th and 25th.

26th to 31st: The 26th saw a change too much colder, and generally dry, clearer conditions, as the cloud cleared away westwards. Largely sunny on 26th and 27th with sunny periods from 28th to 30th, though the south-west of Wales cloudy on 29th. Becoming rather cloudy and misty from the east on the 31st, though clear or sunny spells continuing over western coasts. Frosty overnight from the morning of 27th, with -6.5 °C recorded at Hawarden on 27th. Daytime temperature maxima cold or very cold and feeling especially cold in the wind on 26th. Maxima below freezing in places from 29th, with -1.8 °C at Lake Vyrnwy (Powys) on 30th and -2.7 °C at Hawarden on 31st.

Scotland diary of highlights

Cold first half, then a changeable milder interlude before turning colder again after Christmas. Rainfall mostly below normal, but above normal near parts of east coast. Sunshine above normal. Temperatures mostly rather below normal; coldest December since 1999.

1st to 15th: Bright on 1st with wintry showers towards east coast but rain and snow spread to the north-west during the evening. Outbreaks of rain, sleet and snow gave widespread icy conditions on 2nd. The 3rd started bright and frosty but rain, sleet and snow pushed in from the west late in the day, bringing 16 cm of lying snow to Eskdalemuir (Dumfries and Galloway) overnight. The rain, sleet and snow became confined to the north-east on 4th, with frost and fog patches developing during the evening. A wet day in the east on 5th but elsewhere was mainly dry and bright. The 6th brought mainly fine but frosty and, locally, very icy weather, although the north-west saw a few showers. The 7th started fine and frosty then heavy rain reached the north and north-west later. The rain cleared southwards overnight leaving icy conditions in the north, and a day of sunshine and showers on 8th. The 9th to 11th saw sunny or clear spells with overnight frosts and showers, the showers mainly in the north where they were wintry, although patchy rain and hill snow spread into the west later on 11th. The 12th saw rain and hill snow become more persistent and heavier through the late morning and afternoon, accompanied by occasionally gale force southerly winds. Rain and hill snow, heaviest in east, affected many places on 13th, although the west became drier. Rain and hill snow in the north-east died out during 14th to leave most places dry but showers affected the west coast. The 15th started frosty and mainly dry; parts of the south-west saw persistent fog, but rain reached the north and west later.

16th to 21st: A band of rain spread south-east on 16th bringing the mildest day for three weeks. The 17th saw sunshine and showers, but occasionally heavy rain reached the west later. On 18th heavy rain cleared south followed by sunshine and blustery showers, turning wintry in the north. The 19th saw heavy rain in the west, with local flooding, and severe gales or storms in the north, Kirkwall (Orkney) gusting to 86 m.p.h. Mainly dry and bright at first on 20th with winds easing, but rain returned north-eastwards during the afternoon and evening. The rain cleared on morning of 21st followed by brighter weather with blustery showers, and severe gales affected the north.

22nd to 31st: From 22nd to 26th it was rather cloudy with some light rain, although the east remained largely dry and bright. Thereafter a generally dry and cold end to the year, rather cloudy at times in the south and east with some light showers on 28th. Frost became widespread inland, with temperatures dipping to -12.9 °C at Aviemore (Highland) early on 30th, and freezing fog persisted for 4 days around Inverness.

Northern Ireland diary of highlights

Cold first half, then milder and more unsettled before turning cold again after Christmas. Rainfall rather below normal. Sunshine above normal. Temperatures around one degree below normal; coldest December since

1996.

1st to 15th: The 1st was mainly sunny with a few showers in the north. The 2nd saw sunshine and showers with icy roads early and late. The 3rd started bright and frosty but rain, sleet and snow spread east during the evening. The rain and snow cleared early on 4th, then it was bright with scattered showers, and a patchy frost developed in the evening. The 5th brought a few morning showers but otherwise the next few days were mainly fine but frosty, with -7.5 °C at Katesbridge (Co Down) early on 7th. Overnight rain cleared early on 8th, to leave the next few days with sunny or clear spells, occasionally wintry showers and overnight frosts. The 11th started mainly dry but rain spread east during the afternoon. The 12th was cloudy and milder with occasionally heavy rain. Colder again on 13th and 14th with showers in the north and west but most places were dry and bright. The 15th started frosty but became cloudy with a little light rain.

16th to 21st: Rain spread east on 16th followed by showers. The 17th started cold and sunny, but became cloudy with a little rain later. A windy start on 18th then, following a band of rain, it turned brighter and colder. Cloudy with outbreaks of rain on 19th, becoming drier and clearer later with north coast gales. The 20th and 21st were cloudy with patchy rain and drizzle, heavy for a time (Castlederg, Co. Tyrone, measured 14.2 mmin 24 hours on 19th/20th), although it became clearer with a few showers later on 21st.

22nd to 31st: Apart from outbreaks of rain on 23rd, from 22nd to 26th it was mild, rather cloudy and mainly dry, although it turned colder later on 26th with an evening frost. The rest of the month was then dry with rather a lot of cloud although there were some decent clear or sunny spells and overnight frosts, especially in the west (Castlederg recorded-5.9 °C on 29th).

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